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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/10/2017  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MCAP](#) [KN](#) [ET](#)  
SUBJECT: PRIME MINISTER MELES ON NORTH KOREAN ARMS  
RELATIONSHIP

REF: A. STATE 124866  
[B](#). ADDIS 1743  
[C](#). STATE 72005

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto for reasons 1.4 (A), (B), and  
(D).

FOLLOW UP ON NORTH KOREAN ASSISTANCE TO ETHIOPIA  
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[1](#)1. (S/NF) Ambassador and ORA chief met with Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles on December 10 in follow-up to prior meetings on North Korean relations. The Ambassador expressed appreciation for opening up Ethiopia's munitions factory in Ambo, which operates in connection with North Korea, to a visit by the U.S. Embassy on December 18. The visit will help the U.S. assess the composition and scope of the munitions factory in order for Washington to provide information to the Ethiopian government on opportunities to retool the factory and to advise on what other countries might be able to replace North Korea in the provision of munitions. The issue remains, as the Prime Minister noted for the Secretary during her visit to Addis Ababa on December 5, that North Korea is able to help Ethiopia produce munitions cheaply in comparison to other countries. The cost of retooling could be very expensive and impact negatively on Ethiopia's military capabilities at a time that it is dispatching troops to Darfur for UN-AU peacekeeping, maintaining troops in peace keeping operations in Liberia, counter insurgency operations in the Ogaden and stabilization efforts in Somalia.

AMBO MUNITIONS FACTORY - RETOOLING AWAY FROM NORTH KOREA  
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[1](#)2. (S/NF) The Prime Minister raised questions about UNSC resolution 1718 on sanctions on receiving North Korean assistance. The Prime Minister said the Ambo plant and cooperation with North Korea has two purposes: 1) production of munitions, not only for small arms but also some rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) and BM-21 (truck mounted rocket launchers), and 2) enhancing the capability of AK 47 rifles. Thus far, Meles said, North Korea has not met its promise to transfer technology on the AK 47 upgrade. North Korean officials noted to the Ethiopian Government (GoE) that they are awaiting parts from North Korea. Prime Minister Meles noted that Russia would not transfer the technology, or at least, the cost was too prohibitive. North Korea was willing

to transfer technology on how to upgrade the AK 47 at a very low cost. So far, Meles added, North Korea has only honored production of hundreds rather than the promised 10,000 advanced AK 47 rifles.

¶3. (S/NF) The Prime Minister explained that Ethiopia could suspend the ammunition, BM-21, and AK 47 upgrade production if the UN sanctions prohibit this program. This would severely constrain the Ethiopian military forcing them to rehabilitate older AK 47 in Ethiopia's inventory or purchase weapons. The munitions production can be continued without North Korean assistance, but the issue would be quality. The Prime Minister questioned whether North Korean assistance with technology transfer or technology training would be prohibited under UN sanctions. The Ambassador said he would return with an answer. The Prime Minister commented that in addition to the Ambo plant, North Korea had an engineer working at the Ministry of Water.

COMMENT

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¶4. (S/NF) The Ambo factory visit will probably be an initial visit. Prime Minister Meles raised the issue of an American expert visiting the plant because of his hope that the U.S. can provide financial support in retooling the plant, help with munitions technology, and suggest possible alternate imports sourcing. The Prime Minister was forthcoming in his remarks to the Ambassador, as well as to the Secretary last week, of Ethiopia's desire to be in compliance with UNSC resolution 1718, which would entail severe challenges to Ethiopia's military in meeting its counter insurgency operations and peacekeeping responsibilities. In addition to the Ambo factory, Post will continue to investigate the full

scope of North Korean defense and commercial activities throughout Ethiopia. End Comment.  
YAMAMOTO